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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on some key varieties of decisions governing instructional affairs in public elementary schools. Twenty-nine elementary schools, 16 of which utilized team teaching and 13 of which employed conventional instruction, composed the sample in this study. The control structure interview was used as one of the key data collection methods. The findings indicate that more than half of the instructional decisions were made by individual classroom teachers. In the schools utilizing team teaching, a substantial proportion of decisions were made by the teacher work group. In the schools without teams, a substantial number of instructional decisions were made by persons outside the school. It was found that elementary principals rarely collaborated with individual teachers in deciding on instructional activities. Instead, principals participated more frequently with other nonteachers and teacher groups and made unilateral decisions. Supervision of instruction by administrators seems, for all practical purposes, to be minimal. These findings challenge current concepts of school supervision. (Author/DS)

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April 1976

Supervision as Administration:

The Control Structure of the School

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Abstract

The report focuses on some key varieties of decisions which govern instructional affairs in public elementary schools. More than half of the implicated decisions are made by individual classroom teachers. In schools with teaching teams, however, a substantial proportion of decisions are made by the teacher work group. In schools without teams, a substantial number of decisions are made by persons outside the school. Elementary principals are found to collaborate rarely with individual teachers in deciding on instructional activities. Rather, principals participate more frequently with other non-teachers and teacher groups or make unilateral decisions. Supervision of instruction by administrators seems, for all practical purposes, to be trivial. Especially in team schools, but also to a surprising degree in conventional schools, teachers often participate in rendering instructional decisions which their colleagues may implement. The research findings thus challenge our current understanding of school supervision. Some assumptions which underlie school supervision are also challenged.

Supervision as Administration:
The Control Structure of the School*

The enduring urge to bring to bear regularly expert and reasoned influence on teaching is not an idle design. Yet, for a variety of reasons teachers seem especially unsuited as objects of routine bureaucratic or professional review. They lack a set of accepted practices which might serve, when displayed, as evidence of acceptable instrumental conduct. In the ecology of their setting they are displaced physically and emotionally from their fellow faculty members as well as from their hierarchical superiors. The interdependence of their tasks is so slight as to minimize the need for work related contacts and clever mechanisms that coordinate the timing, pacing and substance of their contributions. So buffered from the vagaries of uncertain influences, teachers are relatively free to establish idiosyncratic classroom routines. This can be a source of concern.

Supervision of instruction (or teaching) is generally recognized as one of education's most prominent non-events. Nevertheless, there are among us many who make a living by offering advice and counsel to school supervisors. And, yes, there is a rather large occupational force whose primary role assignment is the supervision of instruction. Nonetheless, the absence of supervisory activity in schools is well documented and while publically lamented, it may be privately welcomed (Meyer and Rowan, 1975).

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For those who study schools as organizations, these few comments summarize our current knowledge of school supervision. However, important work at Stanford and Oregon challenges in part this prevailing view, at least when considering elementary schools with certain formal organizational or architectural properties. Meyer and Cohen (1971) and Pellegrin (1970) report separately interesting, parallel findings. Under conditions of open space architecture or the creation of formal teaching teams or both, teachers report increased teacher group influence over classroom affairs. In conventional elementary schools these groups have no counterpart.

In the sense that supervision connotes direct influence on the instructional process by professionals other than only line administrators or staff coordinators, these findings suggest that under special circumstances supervision may occur frequently enough to warrant the interest of social scientists and educational policy makers. With regard to the latter, if it can be determined reliably that under certain circumstances supervisory-like behavior occurs naturally, then it may be possible to develop strategies to capitalize on the benefits and reduce the side payments.

A Current Study

For some time my colleagues, Richard Carlson, W. W. Charters, Jr., and I have been conducting a study that tests longitudinally and somewhat more objectively the findings of these earlier cross-sectional, exploratory investigations. Accordingly, we have a sample of 29 elementary schools, 16 of which adopted a unit organization--installed teaching teams--between the first and second of five scheduled data collections. Data are collected at six month intervals. The last will be taken in April, 1976. The other 13 "control" schools are in

the same districts as the "experimentals." As a group, they match their counterparts on a number of demographic features (Packard, et al., 1976).

One of the key measures developed in conjunction with this work is the control structure interview. This is explained in great detail elsewhere (Packard, et al., 1976) and we shall do little more than allude to some of its central properties. The interview is applied to teachers. In a highly systematic and detailed fashion the interviewer attempts to locate two basic bits of information for each of a large number of school decisions. Ascertained are the identity of the decision makers--which we call the input population--and the identity of those whose behavior is to be governed by the decision. The latter is called the output population. In comparing the input and output populations it is possible to derive a number of decision types. The basic types are described below. In all cases the output population consists of one or more teachers.

The collegial decision is one in which two or more teachers jointly render a decision for themselves. The leader determined decision occurs when some but not all output population members constitute the input population. A shared decision is recognized when a non-member of the output population, say the principal, participates as a member of the input population along with some or all output members. The removed decision takes place when no output members are in the input group. Discretion, the fifth basic type, refers to cases where a single individual, a teacher, constitutes exactly both populations--she made the decision for herself.

We have thus traced the control structure of these schools for the past two years. Presently, we have made some preliminary analyses of the first three waves of data. Since the interview takes as problematic the findings of

both precursor studies and the current depiction of schools as organizations, we can comment on the level of supervision conducted by administrators and teaching colleagues.

For the purposes of this paper we shall confine our attention to four of the 19 task areas covered in the interview. These decisions for determining (1) the content of daily lessons, (2) when and how long subjects are taught, (3) teaching materials used recently, and (4) methods of instruction are especially germane to our present discussion of the governance of instruction. General trends which will be described here are paralleled in a rough way in the entire set of data.

Of methodological interest is the fact that the control structure interview has recorded changes that are predicted by previous research. Other subjective measures of decision making taken directly from one of the two prior studies do not show the treatment effect by the third data collection. It should also be kept in mind that the interview seeks very particular and concrete as opposed to global and summary data often characteristic of studies of organizational decision making. Data are aggregated first within each and then across the various task areas. Percent figures are based on calculations which adjust for differences in the number of decisions recorded among the 29 schools.

Preliminary Findings

For this analysis we shall investigate some and not all of the various decision types. Thus portrayed is a partial or incomplete picture of the governance of affairs of the classroom. Retained from the original five member decision typology are the types collegial and discretion. The first reveals teacher group decisions; the second teacher autonomy. Carved out of

the shared and removed types are decisions in which the principal, the primary elementary supervisor, participates. From the shared category come two subtypes "Bounded discretion" are instances in which the principal and a single teacher jointly select an instructional alternative. "Conjoint" decisions are those in which the principal, another non-teacher and one or more teachers comprise the input population. These latter subtypes are of special interest since they seem to capture the flavor of the supervisory literature. A fifth type is extracted from the removed category. Called "Principal directed" it refers to cases in which the principal unilaterally selectes an alternative course of action.

Discretion. Clearly, discretion is the predominant decision type in the four task areas pertaining to instruction. Roughly 55 percent of all reported decisions are discretion. This value does not differentiate between team and conventional schools and does not change after the introduction of the treatment. The relative proportion of discretionary decisions is interesting for a number of reasons. While it tends to reaffirm the position that teaching is "idiosyncratic specialization", that it does not reach higher values, say 90 percent, indicates many more instructional decisions are influenced by many more persons than one might expect. That it does not decrease in the team schools is also surprising. Teams are reputed to reduce the proportion of decisions over which individual members previously had held discretion. (In some other task areas, say subjects in which lessons are presented, discretion does decrease as predicted.)

Bounded Discretion. The extent to which the principal collaborates with individual teachers about instructional affairs is trivial. Across the

three data collections, the relative proportion of decisions of this type never exceeds two percent. By the third data collection bounded discretion for all practical purposes did not occur in the team schools.

Conjoint. In league with other non-teachers, principals do participate in a noticeable number of shared decisions. Over the three data collections an average of about six percent of instructional decisions were of the conjoint variety. This category differentiates between the two types of schools, but in an unexpected way. The conventional schools show an increase over time (an observation attesting to the utility of a longitudinal research design).

Principal directed. Principals appear at a somewhat higher frequency in removed than in conjoint, shared decisions. Over time the value remains steady, about 8 percent, in conventional schools but drops slightly in the team schools. This is somewhat elevated over the conjoint variety primarily due to heavier principal participation in scheduling the time and length of class periods; an area in which there is, correspondingly, the lowest level of teacher discretion.

Collegial. The most dramatic change in the team schools and, thus, the point of sharpest distinction between them and the control schools occurs in the category of collegial decisions. From roughly the same starting point at the first data collection, an average of 9.5 percent, the team schools report nearly 20 percent collegial decisions at the next two data collections. The corresponding value in the conventional schools actually dropped from eight to about five percent over the course of the study.

The first of these changes had been predicted. Owing to the stability of discretion over time, the increase in the proportion of collegial deci-

sions indicates proportional decreases in the frequency with which non-teachers render instructional decisions. Among the current sample the losses are most obvious in the categories of bounded discretion and principal directed decisions; about two percent in each case.

Remarks

Our incomplete investigations of a yet to be completed set of data lead to some interesting speculations about the state of supervision in public elementary schools. On the one hand, decision making about instructional affairs falls disproportionally into the category discretion. This jibes with current knowledge of patterns of public school governance, but not to the degree one might expect. At least 40 percent of the decisions which, in our sample of schools, bear directly on instruction are not made by individual teachers for themselves alone. Among this set are additional points of interest. In the team schools, next to discretion, collegial decisions appear with greatest frequency. In the conventional schools, removed decisions in which the principal is not a member of the input population occur with next greatest frequency. Clearly, principals do not play a major role in the governance of instruction at least when calculated by this measure of decision making.

The difference between the two types of schools is instructive. In team schools great influence is exerted by one's teaching colleagues, who, by and large, are close to the action. In conventional elementary schools considerable influence is exerted by non-teachers and in many respects by persons who work elsewhere in the district.

But even in conventional elementary schools there appear with surprising frequency instructional decisions which are jointly made, collegial,

leader determined and shared, by persons working together in the same school building. These decisions are made in conjunction with other teachers.

Continuing investigations into our data both present and anticipated may change the complexion of this current report, but not, I suspect, much of its substance. There is considerable room, naturally occurring, in schools that permits others, especially other teachers, to participate in rendering instructional decisions. These decisions are undertaken with the participation of the teachers who will be expected to implement them. This observable fact has a number of implications.

Those interested in supervision may be encouraged to abandon a number of assumptions. The elementary teacher apparently does not enjoy (or even seek) unbounded discretion over all classroom affairs. [Data which we report elsewhere (Packard, et al., 1976; Charters, 1976) indicates, for example, that the self-contained classroom is not a fair characterization of the modern, conventional elementary school.] Supervisors might well take into account the possibility and seek the points of contact in which teacher decision making is shared; that is to say, where the individual teacher is not the proper unit of supervisory attention. Supervisory theory and practice should be cognizant also of the fact that conditions ripe for supervision in its broadest and, perhaps, most productive sense may abound. Such conditions are emergent routines involving groups whose members do not include formal organizational supervisors. Supervisors should be aware that evaluations of instruction are more likely to be regarded as sound and welcome when the evaluator is close to, if not intimately involved in,

the work of the person being evaluated (Scott and Dornbusch, 1975, p. 184). For the elementary teacher, colleagues at the same or adjacent grade levels appear to be the most likely candidates.

Finally, we are impressed by the unfortunate connotations of the term supervisor as it applies to education. It is obvious those charged with supervisory responsibilities rarely direct unilaterally or collaboratively govern classroom events. Furthermore, the general animosity with which most members of our culture regard supervisory behavior must only be magnified in schools where highly educated teachers assume, with relatively modest extrinsic rewards, complex and uncertain tasks. There is little support for the advice that school administrators must wrest a larger share of the governance of instruction from the classroom teacher. There is little to say for encouraging principals to enter into collaborative decision making with teachers unless they are also directly implicated by the resultant decision. Rather, use of the term supervisor ought to be discontinued in education. Instead, administrators might be better advised to identify and nourish conditions naturally occuring in which faculty members govern jointly affairs that integrate their teaching.

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